

Planning/Assessment Tool Kit: Mail-in Survey

How-to Guidance

Overview

A mail-in survey can be a good way to collect baseline data about awareness, attitude, and/or behavior of the audience you wish to target for your pet waste campaign. The information obtained can be used to help design an effective message for your outreach efforts, and conducting the surveys before and after your campaign can be used to measure your program's success. In addition, a survey can be used to find out the best method to communicate with your audience. Surveys can be conducted by mail, phone, e-mail, website, or in person. Consider your resources and the size of your target area when choosing your survey method. This guidance is designed for a mail survey. For other methods and more information, refer to "Getting In Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns" by EPA at www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/outreach/documents/.

Materials

- Mailing list labels of the target area
- Return postage
- Return address to mail back the completed surveys

Method

1. Before getting started

- Confirm a survey is needed.** Consider what you need to know and how you will use the information you gather. You may be able to use other methods to find out the answers to some of your questions. For example, the local animal control officer or police department may have the number of dogs registered in your target area, or conduct a "Windshield Survey" (see Windshield How-to Guidance in this section) to determine how pet waste is currently being disposed of.
- Identify your mailing list.** Make sure that you have a mailing list of your pet waste campaign target area. Some cities and towns will provide mailing lists for targeted neighborhoods or local watershed organizations, or neighborhood or condo associations may share their mailing list information.

- Designing the survey.** Keep your survey short! Try to keep it under five questions. State your objectives clearly, make the format easy to read, and include a self-addressed stamped envelope or postcard to increase the return rate. Consider how you will tabulate your responses when writing your questions. Questions can be multiple choice, yes or no, ratings, or open-ended fill-in-the-blanks. Keep in mind, open ended questions may be the most difficult to tabulate – but can also be the most interesting to read. Give a reasonable deadline for completing the survey and consider providing an incentive or prize for returning surveys. A typical return rate for mail surveys can range from 20-40 percent.

- Testing the survey.** Do a test run of the survey questions with some friends to demonstrate whether the questions make sense and if the answers are useful to help design and evaluate your pet waste program.

- Mailing the survey.** Self addressed post cards can be created with card stock paper cut in halves or quarters (see example on next page). [The final size must be rectangular, with a minimum size of 3¹/₂" x 5" and a maximum size of 4¹/₄" x 6".] Cards can then be mailed out in envelopes with instructions and then returned as post cards. Self addressed stamped envelopes for returning surveys will cost more to purchase and for postage.

- Analyzing and using the data.** Once the results are in, tally the responses on paper and determine how the data or responses will be applied to your pet waste campaign. For example:

Question: "Do you think pet waste is polluting local water ways?"

Nearly 70 percent of residents said either "no" or they that they were "not sure."

Application: This shows that there is a great need for future education on the effects of dog waste on water quality, since most people are either misinformed or have no information at all.

Question: "What do you think would motivate people to pick up and dispose of dog waste?"

The most popular answer to this question was "fines" with a total of 76 responses, followed closely by "handy trash cans" with 73 responses, and "bag dispensers" with 61 responses. Surprisingly, almost as many people suggested more information as a good solution, with 68 and 59 people, respectively, stating this.

Applications: Since only four less people said that "information" would be a good solution than said "handy trash cans," it appears that education might play a large role in a solution. This is especially the case because of the much lower cost of an informational campaign and the added maintenance that would be required to keep the trash cans empty.

- 6. **Follow-up survey:** Following your pet waste campaign, do an "after" survey to measure the success of your campaign and to target further outreach efforts. Be sure to target the same area as the "before" survey and design your survey with questions that compare the changes in knowledge, attitude, or behavior from your "before" survey.

Summary

A mail survey about pet waste may provide a lot of valuable baseline information for your project. Be sure to determine how you will use the information you acquire **before** you do a survey. Although it is important to keep the survey goal focused on learning more about your audience, a survey about pet waste can't help but have the added benefit of getting people talking about pet waste.

You are Invited to Help Us with Dog Waste

What's the Scoop with Dog Poop?



We need your help. As part of an outreach and education effort, we would like to address some concerns regarding how to dispose of dog waste in our community. Please answer the four survey questions on the enclosed card and mail the pre-stamped and addressed post card by _____. These answers are confidential and will help with targeting information to residents about dog waste and to how dispose of it.

~ Thank You!

Questions? Contact the Conservation Commission at _____.

City of Dover
Dover Municipal Building
288 Central Avenue
Dover, NH 03820-4169

JOE CITIZEN
MAIN STR
DOVER NH 03820

Dog Waste Survey

1. In your observation, do you think residents in your neighborhood pick up after their dogs? Circle answer:
While walking their dogs? YES NO
When their dogs go in their own yards? YES NO

2. What have you observed people in your neighborhood doing to dispose of dog waste? Please check all that apply:
 Tossed in their garbage Thrown into the woods
 Flushed down the toilet Tossed or left (indicate where)
 Buried in the ground Other methods (please explain)
 Thrown into a storm drain

3. Do you think pet waste is polluting local waterways?

4. What do you think would motivate people to pick up and dispose of dog waste? Please check all that apply:
 Bag dispensers More info. about why pick it up
 Handy trash cans More info. about what to do with it
 Pressure from others Fines

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